



MEMORANDUM

PSC

Agenda Item No. 8 (D)

TO: Honorable Chairperson Joe A. Martinez and
Members, Public Safety Committee

DATE: July 20, 2004

FROM: George M. Burgess
County Manager

SUBJECT: Animal Services Unit Review

Pursuant to your request at the June 15, 2004 Public Safety Committee Budget Workshop, attached for your review is an executive summary of the review of the Animal Services Unit of the Miami-Dade Police Department prepared by the Office of Strategic Management, Performance Improvement Division. I am currently reviewing the report which was received by my office on July 2, 2004 and will be formulating my recommendations for the September Budget Hearings. Staff will be available to discuss these recommendations at the July Public Safety Committee meeting.

Susanne M. Torriente
Assistant County Manager

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the request of the County Manager, the Office of Strategic Business Management, Performance Improvement Division (OSBM/PI) conducted a review of the Animal Services Unit of the Miami-Dade Police Department. This review identified best practices and offers recommendations across four broad categories related to animal care and control: organizational placement, management, and funding; service priorities; facilities; and community relations and partnerships. Below is a summary of key findings and recommendations for each category.

Organizational Placement, Management, and Funding

In Florida and around the country, animal control agencies in large cities and counties typically are independent and autonomous. Exceptions tend to be placed in departments having complimentary functions, such as neighborhood services, public health, or public safety departments. Although outsourcing may provide public relations benefits to a jurisdiction by deflecting negative public sentiment, this practice is increasingly rare and not recommended by animal care experts. OSBM/PI recommends that the Animal Services Unit be transitioned out of the Miami-Dade Police Department and established either as a standalone department or combined with complimentary neighborhood-oriented services in a new department.

All best practice jurisdictions studied are managed by a veterinarian or other seasoned animal care specialist. These professionals bring with them specialized knowledge and experience in animal care and control, including an understanding of the health and behavioral issues that are central to the animal services function. Miami-Dade County should conduct a national recruitment to identify an animal care and control professional to lead the Animal Services Unit; the Humane Society of the United States can provide assistance in this effort.

Budgeted funding for all but one of the best practice jurisdictions studied is above the minimum of \$4 per capita recommended by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). While all jurisdictions studied are supported by both ad valorem and service-related funding, the ratios of these sources vary widely from agency to agency. Relative to these jurisdictions, Miami-Dade County lies near the bottom both in terms of per capita spending and general fund support. Over the course of several years, the Animal Services Unit's budget should be brought more into line with those of its high-performing peers and with HSUS/ICMA-recommended funding levels.

Service Priorities

Animal care and control agencies regarded as successful were found to have reconciled their often-competing "care" and "control" functions, balancing traditional public health and safety roles (focusing on rabies vaccination and stray animal pick-up) with a new emphasis on fostering humane population control and facilitating animal adoption. Increasingly, best practice jurisdictions work cooperatively with private sector animal welfare organizations, establishing complimentary programs and planning strategically for the future. The Animal Services Unit has made progress toward such an orientation since its transition to the Miami-Dade Police Department. A newly selected director should be tasked with continue strategically in this direction.

Facilities

State of the art animal shelters, according to the International City/County Management Association, “must have the disease prevention components of a hospital, the functional capabilities of a police station, and the user-friendly appeal of a library.” Despite these requisites, many jurisdictions’ shelters, including that of Miami-Dade, are aged and ill-designed for their purpose. A dilapidated facility can harm not only public perception but the health and well-being of potentially adoptable animals. With this in mind, OSBM/PI recommends that the County develop a multi-year capital funding strategy for the Animal Services Unit to secure substantial shelter improvements.

Furthermore, most jurisdictions with state-of-the-art shelter facilities (whether newly constructed or renovated) reported strong cooperative partnerships providing considerable benefits to the capital improvement process. These partnerships vary in nature and scope, from “friends-of” organizations helping to raise funds and secure corporate sponsorships, to public/private joint ventures in pursuit of shared new sheltering and adoption center facilities. OSBM/PI will work with the Animal Services Unit in investigating and pursuing such cooperative opportunities.

Community Relations and Partnerships

Well-regarded animal care and control agencies are notable for their solid community relations and strong partnerships. This study revealed no single formula among best practice jurisdictions for successful community relations; however, each jurisdiction demonstrates strength in at least one of the following areas: community engagement through advisory boards, volunteer programs, and not-for-profit “friends of” organizations; community education; and community collaboration through regional coalitions and alliances. The first of these, community engagement, is an essential starting point for the Animal Services Unit. Provided appropriate channels for contributing their time and talents, members of the public can then assist the Animal Services Unit not only with animal care but with long-range planning, fundraising, community education, and development of broader alliances and strategic partnerships throughout the animal welfare community. OSBM/PI will work with a newly appointed director to help establish a productive model for leveraging community support through volunteer programs, advisory and planning assistance, and fund raising.